

AMERICAN IDEALISM
EXCORIATED

WE HAVE ASSUMED our "idealism" without perhaps, examining it much. We have caught up the word and passed it on without a definite meaning. Now a European radical turns it inside out and shows us some things that may cause surprize. He says that he finds "love of truth obscured in America by commercialism of which pragmatism is the philosophical expression; and love of our neighbor kept in fetters by Puritan morality." Prof. Bertrand Russell, of Cambridge, whose views on the war caused his Government to keep him in England during the struggle, finds that "faults at least as bad as those of America exist in all countries; but America seems as yet somewhat more lacking than some other countries as regards a self-critical minority." Mr. Russell's occasion for speaking in *The Freeman* (New York) is his view of the nature of our future relations with China. With them we have nothing to do in this department, but Mr. Russell's comment on our "civilization" (a subject that keeps our younger "critical minority" awake nights) is pertinent to our field. Professor Russell reads us a lesson in view of "the new temptations to which America will henceforth be exposed":

"I know there is in America a great deal of what is called 'idealism.' But what are its manifestations? Prohibition certainly is due to 'idealism.' Now there are many arguments in favor of prohibition, and I am not myself prepared to oppose it, but no student of modern psychology will suppose that these arguments were what persuaded the nation. Apart from the interests of those who make non-alcoholic drinks, and the hopes of employers that their men would work harder, it must have been the case that there were more people who found pleasure in preventing others from drinking than people who found pleasure in drinking themselves..."

"So far, 'idealism' may be identified with love of persecution. If I were concerned to analyze its unconscious psychological sources, I should say that this form of it results from a conflict between the Christian duty of loving one's neighbor and the natural man's impulse to torture him. A reconciliation is effected by the theory that one's neighbor is a 'sinner,' who must be punished in order to be purified. People cling to the conception of 'sin,' because otherwise they would have no moral justification for inflicting pain. 'Idealism,' in this form, is moral reprobation as a pretext for torture."

